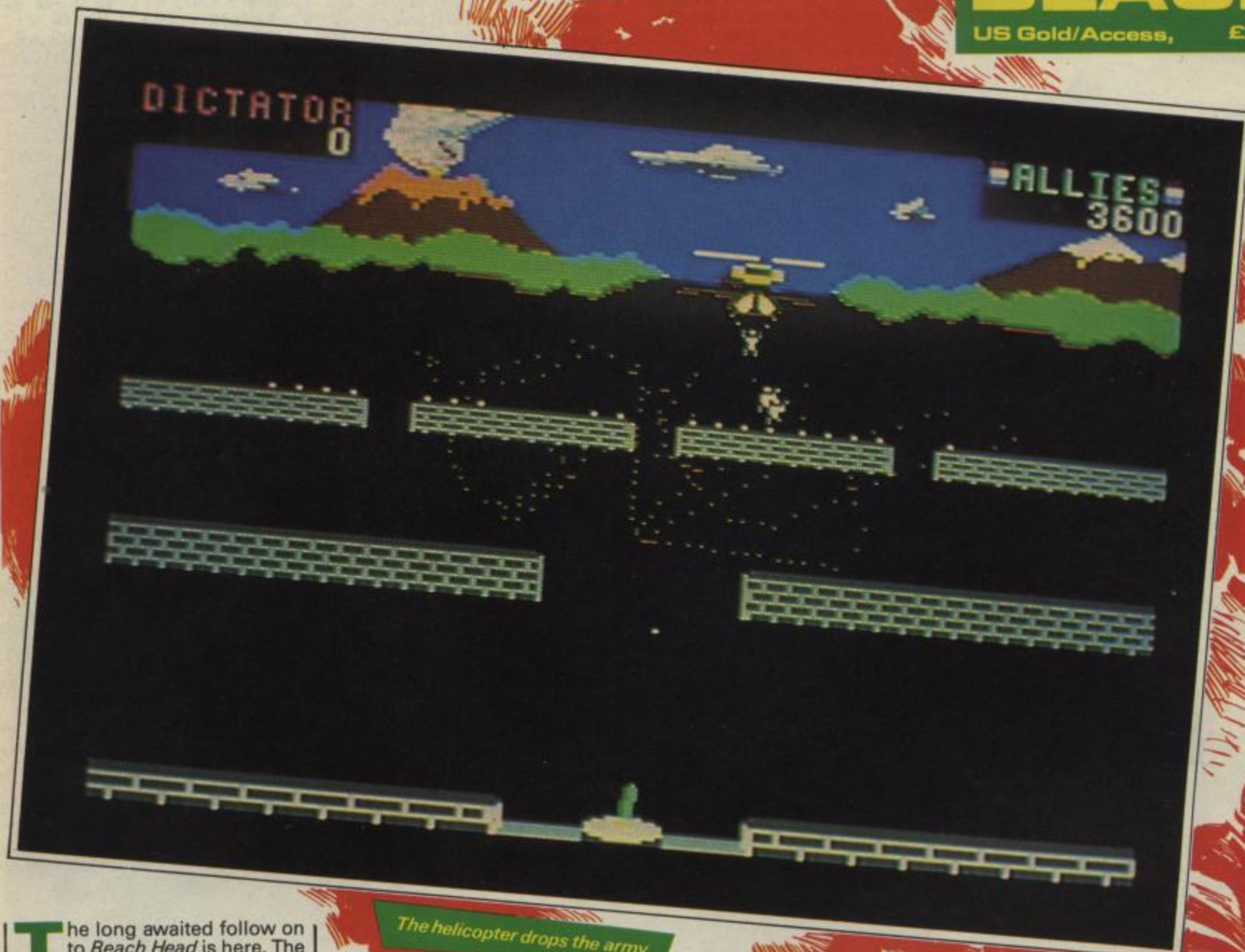




TEST

BEACH

US Gold/Access, £9.95



The helicopter drops the army

The long awaited follow on to *Beach Head* is here. The saga of the conflict between the evil Dictator (known as the Dragon) and the allies, led by JP Stryker continues in this arcade war game.

The year is 1947 and the Dictator has gone into hiding after World War II and set up his own army on an island somewhere in the Pacific. In this game you can either play the Dictator defending his island against the allied invaders or the invading allies. You can also play against a friend in a two player 'head to head', the only thing is sorting out who is going to be the baddy and who the goody.

The first screen starts quite violently. If you play the dictator you have to repel the allied strike force being parachuted onto the island. You are in control of a powerful machine gun in a pill box and you have to shoot down the advancing men. Sounds easy? Well, to make life difficult there are three sets of walls between the parachute drop-zone and the pillbox. When the men are first dropped they all hide behind the furthest wall. On the command 'follow me men' they start to advance. You can

I wasn't a fan of Beach Head, it was far too superficial and easy. Raid Over Moscow was pretty good but it was still rather easy. Beach Head II, on the other hand, has a really good challenge, the computer plays well as both sides and proves a formidable opponent on high levels. The graphics, especially on the first screen, are fabulous. On the command 'follow me men!' the allies charge forward and try to storm the machine gun pillbox. The animation on the men is state-of-the-art. Even though they're very small you can see exactly what they're doing they're so lifelike. Just watch when they climb over the walls and lob grenades. ... I HAD to stop and watch them on my first game they're that good!

Shooting them is great fun as they all scream 'Aaaaagh!', 'Ugh!', 'MEDIC!' or 'I'm hit!' (forlornly) when they die. The speech synthesis on this screen (as with all screens) is absolutely first class, very clear and lots of it (even in the most unsuspecting places — on screen two try shooting the escaping prisoner when you're playing the allies!)

The second screen is very hard, controlling four things (if you play the dictator) is tricky, but not impossible — as usual practice makes perfect. The graphics on this screen are excellent with detailed buildings, aerial mines and even tiny little billboards. The scrolling is very smooth and the 3D is realistic. Playing the Dictator is great fun, especially if you bring down your friend's helicopter when it's packed out with men.



HEAD II

cass, £14.95 disk, joystick only



Beach Head was all very nice to look at and listen to, but I found it lacked any real game behind it and it soon became boring to play. I thought that this was going to be the case with this follow up when I first saw and played it: The graphics are fabulous, with some outstanding animation on the soldiers that made me stop and stare in amazement — it was almost film like! I thought the sound was as good as, if not better than, the graphics with some very good and befitting noises for such a game. The speech was excellent, plentiful and on occasions amusing, but I felt sometimes it was nothing more than cosmetic (although it by no means a waste of time and memory).

Both the graphics and sound on Beach Head II impressed me as much as those on the original did a year ago. The game itself is harder than Beach Head although the actual ideas are just as simple and weak. It's an enjoyable game to play with oneself and is great fun with another person. Plenty of excellent options to aid lasting interest, but it's mainly the two player aspect that puts it so high in my books.



Sneaking past tanks, mantraps and rocks

The final conflict, the knife fight between the Dictator and JP Stryker is my favourite screen. The two men are fantastically animated as they jump and duck the knives they throw at each other. There's loads of speech on this screen too, the Dictator shouts 'you can't hurt me!' when he's hit. When a knife reaches its target an according 'Ugh!' is heard and on plummeting into the river after being hit four times a man will scream as he falls. Overall Beach Head II must be one of the best games to make its way across the Atlantic. We've reviewed the disk version but even the cassette version (which will have to be loaded in parts) is an absolute must.

shoot them as they run to the second wall. Try to shoot as many men as possible because the amount of men reaching the second wall will be doubled by reinforcements. Then the parachutists continue their advance toward the third wall using the walls as shelter. On reaching the third wall they try to blow up the machine gun by chucking hand grenades at it. Some men will climb over the wall and try to draw your fire, others will sneak round it and lob a grenade. If you don't shoot a grenade thrower before he lobs then you'll get blown up.

If you shoot every soldier (very hard) then the game will end. But it's more likely that the will soldiers get past the machine gun then you'll move to the second screen.

Here you have to stop prisoners escaping from the island prison by killing them. These prisoners are, of course defended, the machine gun used in the previous screen has been over-run, captured by the allies and is

now used against you. To help you with your task are four separate items: a tank (which will squash the escapee), a half-track vehicle (if it draws level with the prisoner it will machine gun him down), a soldier on the prison walls can be used to drop a mine on the head of the man below and finally there is a trapdoor containing a mine laying soldier.

The firepower of the machine gun is huge and you'll find that even with these four to help you prisoners will escape in droves and your forces will be disposed of quickly and in large amounts.

If any prisoners escape then you move onto the 'escape' screen, which is very reminiscent of the approach run in *Raid Over Moscow*. In a one player mode you have to take the role of the allies for this round, even if you're playing the dictator (?).

In this *Xenious* style horizontally scrolling screen you have to fly a helicopter full of escapees through the island's defences. Once you have filled the machine with a number of men (you

can choose how many) the computer will select one of the three difficulty levels. Obviously the more men you carry the higher the level the computer will choose. Once the computer has selected a level it cannot choose that level again so tactical helicopter loading is vital.

When selection is over it's flying time. Blast everything including buildings, lookout towers and the moving firing tanks to gain points. There are walls with gaps in them which you have to fly through, and if you don't shoot the moving tank on the wall before going through then it's very difficult to avoid being shot down. If you are hit then you have another chance on the same level with the same amount of prisoners. If you get shot down again then you lose all the men carried in the 'copter and you'll have to tackle another level with the men remaining. When you try level three beware, everything shoots at high velocity and tanks move very quickly. Also on levels two



TEST

At the time I thought Beach Head was pretty smart, although I have to admit it was really the Beach Head itself that was the best, the other screens being a bit primitive. Beach Head II is far more consistent in quality and certainly has some great animation of the characters, especially the grenade throwers and yourself versus the dictator in the knife throwing finale. I particularly liked the way the opening battlefield slowly gets pockmarked with bullet holes.

This game is, of course, another from US Gold with dubious ethics that ought to get the anti-violence brigade 'up in arms', but for the normally well-balanced arcade player, the realistically ghastly death rattles, screams and painful shouts of surprise should only enhance the fun of playing Beach Head.



Third screen: a bit like Xevious - the chopp is just past the bridge



The final showdown (Dictator's on the left), as the knives fly across the river



Presentation 91%
Nice box and a wealth of options.

Graphics 90%
State-of-the-art animation, and excellent scenery.

Sound 96%
Loads of realistic, digitised speech and authentic war noises.

Hookability 91%
Once seen it's difficult to put down

Lastability 89%
Plenty of challenge with three levels, playing either side and a two player option.

Value for money 88%
Worth its weight in (US) Gold!

Overall 90%
A fantastic piece of software, one look will convince you.

and three the final wall you have to fly through has doors which open and close, making life fraught.

Getting past this screen then you'll meet JP Stryker in the final conflict. The two face each other over a blackened river in a knife fight to the death. You have to hurl knives at JP and hit him four times to send him plummeting into the river and a certain watery grave. There are nine rounds of the knife fight and bonuses are given for hits and actually killing your opponent. There's also a big bonus for totally 'blitzing' him and winning by four hits to nil.

Once all nine rounds have

been completed the bonuses are added up and the scores for all four screens are added together. You then have the option to load in the hi-score table which (on the disk version) will automatically save your name, so you've got a record of all your top scores.

If choose the two player option then one player takes control of the allied forces and the other the dictator. The screens play exactly the same but it's up to you to destroy the other player's forces (much aggression with this mode)! There is a hi-score table for both the allied forces and the dictator, which both load and save themselves auto-

matically so you can keep track of your top scores as both the dictator and the allies.

There are three difficulty levels to choose from, the higher the level the faster everything moves. The computer gets more intelligent too and scoring potential increases enormously.

There are demo modes on all screens which allow you to watch and play single screens so you can practise at your weakest points. Other options include increasing and decreasing the sound filter and viewing the hi-score table. If you want you can also turn off the digitised speech (sacrilege)!

